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A true look at authenticity at work requires a multi-faceted focus, a Florida International University study reveals

MIAMI (July 15, 2019) – Is authenticity truly beneficial in the workplace? Are places of work conducive to employee authenticity? Not for everyone, research from [Florida International University’s College of Business](#) (FIU Business) finds.

“The main insight: we caution this notion of encouraging everyone to be authentic,” said [Brooke Buckman](#), assistant professor of [global leadership and management](#) at FIU Business. “In a lot of instances being your true self isn’t always treated equally in the business world as we see today.”

As public interest in authenticity increases, she added, the just published "Being Your True Self At work" paper both reinforces and tempers the existing enthusiasm surrounding the topic.

Buckman and her co-authors analyzed over 100 empirical and seminal studies published since 1997 on individual authenticity in different organizations.

The consensus of most authenticity-focused research is that "there are such great personal benefits to authenticity, that we should encourage everyone to be authentic, even at work," Buckman said.

However, those personal benefits, including feeling happier and more energized, often come at a career-focused cost for minorities, making them feel they’re walking on a tightrope.

“Some women who are authentic at work may be viewed as ‘not management material’ because such behaviors don’t align with our typical vision of a leader or manager,” Buckman added. “Many say they can’t get angry on the job or cry if they’re upset, limiting their ability to be authentic.”

One of the biggest challenges the researchers faced was that most of the existing studies on authenticity are siloed. Many have analyzed the topic, but using labels such as “authentic leadership,” “emotional labor” and “identity management” rather than “authenticity” per se.

"Being Your True Self At work," published in the July 2019 issue of the Academy of Management Annals, aims to create a research agenda for future analyses about authenticity.

"There are lots of definitions and ideas, but until we can all agree on a definition of how we're going to measure authenticity, the literature will become more noisy, messy," Buckman said. "Our research encourages them to start talking to one another; to start looking at the social implications."

This study identifies six directions for the "next generation" of studies on authenticity in organizations:

- A Multifaceted View of Authenticity in Organizations
- Authenticity and Power
- The Dark Side of Authenticity
- Creative Individual Approaches to Authenticity
- Authenticity Over Time
- Authenticity in Different Cultures

The paper was co-authored by Buckman with Sandra E. Cha, Brandeis University; Patricia Faison Hewlin, McGill University; Laura Morgan Roberts, Georgetown University; Hannes Leroy, Erasmus University; Erica L. Steckler, University of Massachusetts Lowell; Kathryn Ostermeier, Bryant University; and Daniele Cooper, University of North Texas.

A copy of the research paper is available upon request.

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